

A
SERMON

THE
The Unpardonable Sin
AGAINST THE

Holy Ghost:

O R,
The SIN unto DEATH.

Wherein is declared, A Plain Description of it, both
Negatively what it is not, and also Positively what it is, and
a plain Reason why it is Unpardonable. With a Word of Comfort
and also of Counsel how to avoid it.

By R. Russell, of Wadburst in Suffex.



Heb. X. xxvi. If we sin wilfully after we have received the know-
ledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sin.



London: Printed for the Author, and sold by J. Blane, at
the Looking-glass on London-bridge. 1700.

OF THE
Unpardonable Sin against the Holy Ghost.

John V. part of Verse xvi. *There is a sin unto death.*

THIS sin which St. John calls here the *sin unto death*, is the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost, described by our Blessed Saviour, *Matth. 12. 32.* That whosoever commits it hath no forgiveness, neither in this world, nor in the world to come; for, *All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, shall not be forgiven unto men: And he that speaks a word against the Son, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever speaks against the Holy Ghost, shall never be forgiven, neither in this world, nor in the world to come.* This sin against the Holy Ghost, is that sin which St. John calls here the *sin unto death*: Not because that sin deserves death, for so does all sin deserve death, both temporal and eternal; for, *The wages of sin (even all) is death*, Rom. 6. But this sin against the Holy Ghost is called, *The sin unto death*; because it binds a man over to eternal death, without any possibility of recovery. Now some there are, that go on from one degree of sin to another, they heighten and aggregate their sins more and more, until they are brought to that height at last, as to commit that sin, for which there is no forgiveness.

There is no meer man since the fall, that can live with-

against the Holy Ghost.

without sin, for all are sinners; but yet there are degrees of sin; some sins in their own nature are small, others are more great and hainous. Many sins there are that are great, yet pardonable, and one sin **treth** is unpardonable, and whosoever commits that one sin, shall have no forgiveness, but must for ever bear the weight and punishment, both of that and all of his other sins. There is such a sin as St. John speaks of here in my Text, that is, *a sin unto death.*

And now I come to the Explication of the words; from whence I shall raise this point of Doctrine:

Doct. That amongst other sins committed by fallen mankind, there is only one sin that is a sin unto death, and whosoever committeth that, he hath no forgiveness, neither in this world, nor in the world to come.

Now for my further proceeding on the subject, I shall lay open to you,

First, What the sin unto death is.

Secondly, That all other sins, how great and hainous soever, may be forgiven.

Thirdly, That this sin alone shall never be forgiven;

Fourthly, The reason why that sin alone is unpardonable: And then,

Lastly, I shall conclude all with a few words of Application.

I shall begin first with the discription of this unpardonable sin; where I shall endeavour to make as plain a discription of it as possible I can; and in doing of it, I shall *First*, shew you Negatively what is not this sin. *Secondly*, I shall shew you Positively what it is.

First, I shall shew you Negatively, what is not this sin unto death, or in what degree a man may sin, and yet not commit that unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost.

First, It is not every quenching of the motions of the Spirit that is that sin; it is true, when the

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Holy Ghost comes with a still voice, and knocks at the doors of sinners hearts for entrance, he often comes and strives with them, and secretly wooes and beseeches them to leave their sins, and be converted; yet they quench and stifle all his motions, and bar up their hearts against him, and will not be obedient to his Heavenly calls; now such sin grievously against the Holy Ghost: But yet this alone is not the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost; for many have stood it out a long time, and have often quenched and grieved the Holy Spirit, yet at last they have been wrought upon unto sincere Conversion.

Secondly, A man may commit many hainous and crying sins, and yet not be guilty of the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost. A man may be an idolator, a whoremonger, a fornicator, a murderer, and work witch-craft, and sin with a very high and, say, he may live in all manner of filthiness and lewdness, and yet not be under the guilt of the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost. Thus we read, *2 Chron. 33.* that *Manasses* sinned with a very high hand; he was an idolator, an inchanter, and worked witch-craft, and dealt with familiar spirits, and wrought much evil in the sight of the Lord. And *Mary Magdalen* had seven devils cast out of her, *Luke 8. 2.* and yet both were pardoned.

Thirdly, A man may sin presumptuously against great light and knowledge, and yet not commit this ~~sin~~ unto death: for *Peter* when he denied Christ, he did it against great knowledge of Christ; he knew Christ to be his Lord and Saviour, he was one of Christ's beloved disciples, and for all that, how strongly he denied Christ, and that with an oath too; and yet for all that, Christ looked upon him with a merciful eye, and he repented, and was forgiven.

Fourthly, It is not every malicious sin that is the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost; for Saint *Paul*

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And certainly had great malice in his heart, when he went on so furiously to persecute the church of God; and yet he was converted, and became a preacher of the Gospel of Christ, which before he persecuted. *Fifthly and Lastly*, It is not final unbelief, nor final impenitence, that is the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost, though some be of opinion, that it is, because that sin is unpardonable; and Christ himself hath said *Matthew 12. 31.* *That all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto man, except it be the sin against the Holy Ghost.* But you are to take the words of our Saviour in their true sense and meaning; it is all manner of sin and blasphemy committed within the compass of a man's life, that shall be forgiven, except the sin against the Holy Ghost; for the sin of final impenitency, and final unbelief, is not compleated until the very moment of a man's death, and then you all know, that there is no repentance, and consequently no pardon after death, for Christ saith, *He that sins against the Holy Ghost, hath no forgiveness, neither in this world, nor in the world to come.* Now why should Christ say in this world, if there be no space to be forgiven in this world? but a man may commit the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost, even many years before his death. Besides, there are many thousands that dye in impenitency and unbelief, and are damned, and yet never committed the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost. Thus have I shewed you negatively what is not this unpardonable sin, none of these sins in particular is that sin.

Secondly, I come now to shew you positively what this sin unto death is, and wherein this unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost doth consist. Now there are several opinions in the world about it, some hold one thing, some another; but I have not time nor room to dispute concerning others opinions about it; but I will endeavour, through God's help, to lead you to the plain

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plain sight of it, by the light of the Holy Scripture:

Now in the first place you must know, that there are two sorts of people that cannot commit this unpardonable sin: *First*, The true believers cannot commit it, though many times, for their tryal, God suffers them to fall foully into many grievous sins; yet they being rooted into Christ, they are upheld by free grace and mercy, that they cannot fall into the unpardonable sin. *Secondly*, The grossly ignorant cannot commit it, because it is a sin against great light and knowledge. Indeed, the greatest part of the world shall be damned; yet amongst that greatest part there is but few of them that can commit that unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost.

Some have both light and grace, these shall not commit the unpardonable sin. Again, some have neither light nor grace these cannot commit it. But there are some again that have light and no grace; these are they that are liable to commit the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost. Now there must be two ingredients to make up this unpardonable sin; that is, light in the head, and malice in the heart; without these two the sin against the Holy Ghost cannot be committed. For to sin against great light and knowledge, is not that sin alone; nor yet to sin ignorantly out of that malice, is not that sin; but they must joyn both together to make up the unpardonable sin: This we see plain by the example of Saint Peter and Saint Paul; Peter he denied Christ, and forswore himself too, and that grievously against great light and knowledge; for he knew Christ to be the only begotten Son of God, and he saw God in him; he was one of Christ's disciples, and one of his beloved disciples too; he was taught of Christ and had experimental knowledge of his love and favour, and yet he wickedly with an oath denied him. Now if Peter had done this out of malice and spite,

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he had committed that sin unto death, for which there is no forgiveness: but Peter had no malice in his heart all this while, even at that time when he denied Christ, as you may see *Marth. 29.* when he told him, *Before the cock crow thou shalt deny me thrice.* He answered, *If I should dye with thee, I will not deny thee.* And then denying him through infirmity and weakness of the flesh, when he had considered what he had done, *he went out and wept bitterly.* And Paul he had great malice and spight against the ways and people of God, as you may see, *1. Paul breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, and desired of them to go to Damascus, to the synagogues, that if he found any of his way, whether men or women, that he should bring them bound to Jerusalem.* Now here was great rage and malice in Saul, against the ways and people of God, but doing it ignorantly; he at last hearing of his voice, saying, *Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?* and receiving of a light from heaven, that it was Jesus that he persecuted, he was pricked at the heart, and trembling and astonished, said, *Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?* Now by these two places of scripture, you may plainly see that Peter sinned against great light, and Paul out of great malice, yet none of them both committed the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost. But whensoever light and malice meet together in one man, then there is the sin against the Holy Ghost. Now as all other sins, so this sin against the Holy Ghost may be committed in thought, word or action.

First, In thought; that is, when a wicked man, against his clear light and knowledge, doth but conceive a malicious thought or purpose towards persecuting the Gospel of Christ, or of the saints of Christ, to hinder the work of the Holy Ghost in them.

This sin, is to be thought, was the sin of the lost

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lost angels, for which cause they were lost without hopes of pardon. Now some dispute whether this sin was a sin of the thought; but I say, with all likelihood it was; for the angels being only spirits without bodies and so have no use of bodily tongues, could not be committed in word, nor yet could they commit it in action, because they were cast out of heaven before they could bring it into practice, therefore it must be a sin of the thought.

Now their sin was this, their habitation being the highest heavens, next under God himself, they had exceeding great light and knowledge, they had more knowledge than all the men in the world ever had, and were happy above all other creatures; when not being contented with this estate, they thought to be as high as God himself; therefore maliciously sought to make war against the Son of God and put him out of his throne, for which cause they were immediately thrust out of heaven, never more to see the face of mercy; and thus from the beginning they have been counted malicious and revengful, raging beast, and a roaring lyon; thus their sin being of the same nature with the sin against the Holy Ghost, they were excluded all hopes of pardon.

But the sin of our first parents was not the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost, is clear, for they sinned against great light, yet they obeyed, and complied with the will of God, even when the temptation came, until at last they were inticed and overcome; but they did not fall maliciously, and so were not excluded a possibility of mercy.

Secondly, This sin may be committed in word too; that is when a man speaks blasphemously and maliciously of Christ and his holy way; this was the sin of the scribes and pharisees, *Mat. 23. 34.* *There were sent twelve scribes and said, This fellow hath Belzebub, and he casteth out devils by the prince of the devils.* Therefore

against the Hol

th Christ to them, 28. 29. *I verely I say unto you, a
shall be forgiven unto th' s'ns of men and bl' sp'hemed
with so ver they shall blaspheme; but wh' soever shall
sp'hem a' a nst the H'ly Ghost, hath never forgiveness,
is in danger of eternal damnation.*

Now the reason of this speech of our bless'd Savi-
is shewed in verse 20. because they said, *He hath an
an spirit; which plainly shews, that these scribes
spoken blasphemy against the Holy Ghost. These
scribes were great learned men, they could know no
other, but that Christ was the Son of God, and they
knew that he cast out devils by the Spirit of God,
and yet they out of spite to Christ, maliciously and
blasphemously said, That he cast out devils by Beelzebub
chief of devils. Thus these scribes committed the
unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost, and that in a
Godward.*

*Thirdly, This sin may be committed in action too,
that is, when a man being once thoroughly enlightened
and entered upon a holy course of life, and tasted the
comforts of God's Spirit, and had some fore-taste of
the joys of heaven, and not only makes profession of
the Gospel, but teaches it to others; he at last takes
dislike of these holy courses, and thro' spite and ma-
lice utterly forsakes opposes and persecute those good
ways of God, which he before profess and taught.
But to sum up this point: This unpardonable sin a-
gainst the Holy Ghost, is fully described by the apostle
to the Hebrews, Chap. 10. 26, 27 28. For if we sin
wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth,
there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, but a fearful look-
ing for of judgement, and fiery indignation; how much sorer
punishment shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden
under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the
covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing,
and have done despite to the Spirit of Grace. Likewise,
Heb. 6. 4, 5, 6. For it is impossible for those who were*

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once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away to renew them again to repentance seeing they crucifie a fresh to themselves the Son of God, and put him to open shame.

Now the sin against the Holy Ghost is briefly this. It is a wilful and malicious opposing of the known truth, joyned with final apostacy.

I shall a little explain these words, and then proceed.

First, This sin unto death is an opposing sin; now to oppose a thing, is to contradict it, or gain-say it; when a man says a thing is so, and so, he denies it, and says it is not so: when a man says a thing must be done, he says again, it must not, nor shall not be done; such an opposition is in the heart of him that commits this unpardonable sin; but a man may be an opposing man, and yet cannot commit this sin; therefore,

Secondly, It is the truth that he must oppose; that is, he must utterly oppose and reject Christ, who said, *I am the truth*, Joh. 14. 6. He opposeth all his threatenings, and will not believe his promises, and counts him to be a seducer of the people, and counts the blood of the covenant to be any unholy thing; nay, he also opposes the Spirit of Christ, who is the spirit of truth; so that he will not obey his motions, and will not be led nor guided by him; but a man may oppose the truth, and yet do it ignorantly; therefore,

Thirdly, It must be the known truth that he opposeth; he must be once enlightened: But you must know, that it is not only a notional knowledge, and humane learning, he may know much of God, and of his will in the letter of the word, and yet not be capable of committing this unpardonable sin: but he must be so far enlightened, as to see the evil that is in sin, and the excellency of Christ; he must tast of the heavenly

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heavenly gift, and be made partaker of the Holy Ghost, and taste of the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come; and by the blood of the covenant, which he counts as an unholy thing, he is in part sanctified and cleansed from many sins, he must have sweet communion with God in his word and sacrament; he must have some taste of the love and favour of God, and comforts of his spirit, and be refreshed by it, and taste of the joys of heaven, and have some fore-taste of the happiness of the world to come.

This is that light and knowledge that lays a man open to the committing of that unpardonable sin: but yet a man may sin against all this light and experiential knowledge, and yet do it through the weakness of the flesh, or through some violent temptation, as Peter did when he denied Christ; therefore,

Fourthly, He must oppose the known truth wilfully; he must wilfully fall away, after he hath received the knowledge of the truth; other sins are committed through infirmity, but this sin is wilful; the will is the chief actor in it; and to compleat and make up this unpardonable sin, there is,

Fifthly, Malice in the heart; without this, this sin cannot be committed; it must be a malicious opposing of the known truth; that is, when a man being once enlightened, and tasted of the heavenly gift, and the good word of God, and have been made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have had some sweet relish and foretaste of heaven, he come at last to take a dislike, and to hate the holy ways of God, and maliciously oppose and persecute them, and to die in despite to the Spirit of Grace, crucifying afresh the Son of God, and putting him to open shame.

Now a man having gone thus far, he comes in the last place to be an apostate; for thus to oppose, thus wilfully and maliciously to oppose the known truth, is always joyned with final and total apostasy; as

against the Holy Ghost.

he that is so far enlightened, as to see the evil of sin, and the excellency of Christ and holiness, and becometh partakers of the Holy Ghost, of his graces and comforts, and tasteth of God's love and favour in Jesus Christ, and has some fore-taste of the joys of the world to come: now for such a one wilfully, spitefully, and maliciously to fall away, he so falls, as never to rise more: It is true, the children of God fall, and that often, and yet rise again; but when they fall through weakness of infirmity, and not wilfully and maliciously, but these wicked wretches fall wilfully and maliciously, and so fall finally. Against such the door of mercy is ever shut; concerning such St. Peter saith, *It had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, then after they have known, to turn from the holy commandments delivered unto them.* But it happened unto them according to the true Proverb, *The dog is turned to his vomit again; and the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire,* 2 Pet. 2. 21, 22. There is such another dreadful place of Scripture against these kind of apostates; that is, *Heb. 10. 26. For if we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sin, but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation.* Thus I have given you five steps, as so many links in a chain, all which makes up the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost. It is a wilful and malicious opposing of the known truth, joyned with final apostacy. Thus I have shewed you as plain as I can, what this sin unto death is. Now to proceed:

Secondly, The next thing to be considered, is, that all other sins or blasphemies whatsoever may be forgiven, be our sins never so great and many, tho' we be the vilest wretches that ever liv'd, yet there is hope of pardon upon repentance: *Manasse* was the vilest sinner that ever we read of, yet he repented and was pardoned: Also *Mary Magdalen* was the chief of sinners,

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for out of her came seven devils, yet because she
and been much, much was forgiven her. A man may be
aces a whoremonger, an adulterer, and work witch-craft,
in Jewry deal with familiar spirits, and yet at last he may
he work and be saved; and yet I have heard talk of
lly, and that are so foolish as to take the sin of fornication
r to be a sin unpardonable; for from God's own words
and the fourth commandment, *I the Lord thy God am a*
through *thy God, visiting the sins of the father unto the third*
ciouly *and fourth generation*: From whence they say, that
children that are base-born are not saved, unto the
f mercy third and fourth generation. But this is a most erro-
Je has rous interpretation of God's word, it is them that
ghen him, and continue hating of him, that he will
oly con- their iniquities upon; for fornicators and adul-
d unto ters themselves may repent and be saved, much more
s turned the children who knew nothing, nor could help na-
to be thing: For Christ with his own mouth tells the
is such tribes and Pharisees, *Mat. 21. 31.* that the Publicans
kind and Harlots shall enter into the kingdom of God before
willfully them; for there is no sin but is pardonable, except
shew the sin against the Holy Ghost. But,

Thirdly, The sin against the Holy Ghost is alone
the sin unto death, that is, a sin unpardonable, never
to be forgiven, neither in this world, nor in the world
to come: Not because the merits of Christ is not
sufficient to pardon it, for this sin, as well as for all
other sins, are but finite, whereas the merits of Christ
are infinite.

Object. But what is the reason then that this sin cannot
be forgiven?

Answer. This question brings me to the fourth thing
considerable; do but mind me a little, and I will as
plain and as clear as I can, tell you what the reason is:

The reason arises from the nature of this sin, for
this sin, by whomsoever it is committed, burdens the
heart, and sears the conscience, so that there is no
place

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place for repentance to be wrought, neither for the nor any other sin. This sin is called the sin against the Holy Ghost; not because it is a sin against the person of the Holy Ghost, for so is all sin against his person, but it is called the sin against the Holy Ghost because it is against the office and work of the Holy Ghost. Now every one of the three Persons have their particular work: the work of the Father is to create; the work of the Son is to redeem lost sinners; and the work of the Holy Ghost is to enlighten, convince, sanctifie, and convert them: Now a man committing this unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost, rejects all this work of the Spirit. Now for a man to be thoroughly enlightened by the Holy Ghost, that he comes to know the evil of sin, and of his lost and undone condition without Christ, and that none but the merits of Christ can save him, then for him wilfully and maliciously to oppose him, and the work of his Spirit, and will not be beholding to him for salvation, now for such a one to be forgiven, is utterly impossible.

Object. But why is it impossible? *Nothing is Impossible with God.*

Answer. Nothing is impossible with God that does not imply a contradiction; but for God to forgive sin committed against the Holy Ghost implies a contradiction: For how can he have pardon given him, that utterly rejects it? As for instance: A man through ignorance may deny Christ, and maliciously fall from the profession of the truth, into all kind of wickedness, as did Saint Paul, and the Jews that crucified Christ: and yet not falling against light and knowledge, there is room for the Holy Ghost to work upon him to enlighten him, and to convince him of his folly, and so makes way for conversion. And besides, a man, after he hath been enlightened, and it falls back, through infirmity and the weakness of the

against the Holy Ghost.

Self, as *Peter* did, and doth not fall wilfully and maliciously, then the Holy Ghost may work upon him, renew him again, and work in him a deep sorrow abusing so much love and mercy, and so carry on good work unto salvation. But for a man when he is once enlightened by the Holy Ghost, and has had some taste of God's love and favour; and some foretaste of the joys of heaven, and then at last utterly opposing the illuminating work of the Spirit, and wilfully and maliciously to fall away, and so to reject the Spirit's renewing work: Alas! then the Holy Ghost has done, he has nothing more that he can work in him; for this wretched creature has utterly rejected him; his enlightening work, his convincing work, his sanctifying work, he has utterly rejected Christ's pardon, heaven and all. Now this poor wretch is past all hopes of mercy, all hopes of pardon; nay, for such a one we are forbidden to pray, as you see in the verse whereof my text is a part. Now Christ prayed for them that maliciously crucified him, *Luke 23. 34. Saying, Father forgive them, for they know not what they did.* Alas! they knew not what they were doing for had they knew it, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory, *1 Corin. 2. 8.* But if they had known, and yet crucified him, Christ would not have spent his breath to pray for them; for it would have been utterly in vain; for when a man has committed this unpardonable sin, all the prayers of heaven nor earth, can do him no good; for as the text saith, *There is a sin unto death.* I shall conclude all with a few words of Application, and I will be as short as possible, because this discourse will be too large for so small a Book. Here is, first, a word of comfort. Secondly, A word of counsel.

First, A word of Comfort: It may be with reading and hearing of this terrible discourse, your hearts begin to ache with fear that you have committed this unpardonable sin: but I think I have sufficiently proved to you

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you what it is; and I tell you again, that there are many that can commit it; yea, there are millions that are tormented in hell, yet never committed this sin. further, an ignorant protestant may through weakness and out of a slavish fear, turn papist, and renounce his profession, and yet not commit this unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost: for doing it out of ignorance and infirmity. there may be matter left for the Holy Ghost to work upon, where by he may yet be converted and saved. Consider this also, if you are afraid that you have committed it, and wish that you had not committed it if it were to do again, then that is a true sign you have not committed it.

Secondly, I must conclude also with a word of Counsel: First, Watch very diligently against all sins; above all take especial heed of those sins that are nearest to the sin against the Holy Ghost; and they are these, hypocrisie, taking only the outward profession of religion, and so dissembling and mocking of God; sinning wilfully against conviction of conscience, against great light and knowledge; sinning presumptuously, and with an high hand: these sins, tho' not themselves are the direct sin against the Holy Ghost, yet they will come very near to it; therefore take special heed of them, lest they in time should bring you to the committing of that unpardonable sin. And,

Lastly, Labour to be sincere in religion, and have true faith, ingraft yourselves into Christ; for they that be with Christ can never commit this unpardonable sin. For know this, that amongst all the sins committed of fallen mankind, there is one sin, that is a sin unto death, which is the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost, which whosoever commits it hath no forgiveness, neither in this world nor in the world to come.

Consider what has been said, and the Lord give you grace to stand.